

Jeannie Hazelwood Oral History

Renee: 0:01

This is Renee Cyr conducting an interview at the Topeka Shawnee Library On July 8 2019, with Jeannie Hazlewood discussing Paganism. How do you define your own religion or path?

Jeannie: 0:29

I would have to say, after several years of thinking about this and and going through a lot of different changes, I'm an American, generic Wiccan. It's just a path that encompasses everything that has evolved since Wicca developed in the 1950s. So that's that's who I am

Renee: 0:03

And do you use the term Wiccan or Witch or Pagan most often?

Jeannie: 0:11

Boy, that's a good question. It depends on my audience. I usually use the term Pagan or Wiccan. I'm not afraid to use the term Witch. But I find that the connotation of Witch is not always received well. And I think that promoting and presenting my faith in a context that's not frightening to people who don't know about it, is important. Now I feel that Witch is a very important word because I believe that it reclaims power. It reclaims our identity, especially as women. But there's a time and a place for the term to be used. You do you have to use it in a in a setting where it's understood, or it causes more damage than good.

Renee: 1:10

And how do you see the relationship of your beliefs with Witchcraft and magick?

Jeannie: 1:20

I practice Witchcraft, I practice magick. they are central and an integral part of my beliefs. Magick is a natural energy. I don't believe that it's supernatural. Magick is science that just hasn't been explained. And magick is given to us by the divine. And it's how we, it's how I worship. It's how I practice. And it helps stir my soul.

Renee: 1:49

How would you describe your general beliefs? What do you think are the defining characteristics?

Jeannie: 1:56

Nature is sacred. I mean, it's...I can't say that I'm a hard polytheist, a soft polytheist, it sometimes feels like I'm agnostic. I know that there's a greater power, I know that there is a deity, how I view that deity changes depending on... we go through waves in our life. And sometimes the feeling of an entity that has a name and a specific presence is felt very strongly. And then there's other times that you know, there's something out there, but you don't always know what it is. And we're just mere humans. We're pretty egotistical if we think we can put a

name and an exact description of this all powerful being, who has given us life and this planet and everything we have. I believe.

Renee: 3:01

Are there specific gods and goddesses you worship?

Jeannie: 3:06

Well, that goes back to the previous question. Yeah, yes and no. I believe that there is a divine female and a divine male aspect to deity. I will call different deities based upon the season, because there are some aspects of deity and specific personas that are very critical or very tied to that seasonal element, that helps bring in the energy that you want for the celebration. I, personally, I do work with a couple of different deities on a very regular basis. And one of them is the Morigan. And the other that I've worked with somewhat is.... she's a Germanic goddess. And now of course, I'm sitting here talking and I can't remember her name. Boy I'm gonna be in trouble for this later. Hretha, and if I butchered that, then I will suffer the consequences at a later date. In general, though, in circle I, I call the Lord and Lady. Because again, I don't think that as a human, I am able to comprehend the full aspect of deity, and what it represents, and what it is. We give them names and faces and shapes so that we can relate to them. It's not because we really know what they are.

Renee: 4:50

Do you believe in and seek assistance from other supernatural beings?

Jeannie: 4:57

No. Well, wait a second, I'd better clarify that. I do work with the elements: air, fire, water, earth. And I'm not going to get into all of the layers and the differences between the elements, the elementals, the watchtowers, and there's significant differences. I personally work with the raw basic elements, and the natural powers of air and fire and water and earth. And they add energy, to my workings, to my celebrations, to my rituals, to my life. So yes, but as far as entities and angels are spirit guides, not so much not so much.

Renee: 5:46

What about ancestors?

Jeannie: 5:50

Yes, ancestors are very important. And boy, asking assistance from them, guidance more so. When I think of assistance, I think of giving me power, giving me energy. The ancestors are to me more of a guide, and someone who I can call on to to help tap into that collective consciousness, that ancient wisdom so to speak. But not so much to help me in a magical way. But more of that deep talking my subconscious and and helping me realize things. Deep wisdom is where I see the ancestors fitting in.

Renee: 6:41

What are your beliefs about the afterlife?

Jeannie: 6:45

I hope there's one. I believe in reincarnation. I do believe that the soul moves forward. In what form, I don't know. Do we come back as another human, maybe. Do we come back as energy, probably in some way, shape, or form. Do we merge with something else and create a new life form a new energy form, maybe. I don't think that this is it, per se. But I don't think that we necessarily come back as a human or another living form. But our soul continues. And I'm hoping that it's something that I'll be aware of when it happens.

Renee: 7:48

So some level of consciousness?

Jeannie: 7:51

Yes. But I don't believe in Hell, I don't believe in punishment. I don't believe in you know. But I don't think that we completely end when we die.

Renee: 8:03

Do you believe in some place sort of like heaven or just a like neutral waiting area that souls go? Or do you think they come back on this realm, plane of existence?

Jeannie: 8:14

I think that a waiting place is a definite possibility. I do like to think that there's this place where our soul goes to review our lessons that we learned in this life, to have a chance to absorb what it was to be human, to advance our soul before it moves to another stage. But I don't necessarily believe that there is a heaven where we ascend to and, and everything is going to be wonderful from there on out. No, I think that there's just a place the soul goes just to adjust before it moves forward.

Renee: 9:13

Do you consider your beliefs more a religion or a spiritual practice?

Jeannie: 9:20

Well, they're kind of tied together, for me. Religion is a tool to help you connect with the divine and to promote spirituality. So my beliefs are the structure that helps me connect with my view of deity, and to help me become more spiritual, to tap into that spiritual place. So they're interconnected, so to speak, they're not the same, but they're in a connected. The part when I talk about religion is the structure. It's the rituals, it's the sabbats, it's connecting and giving me tools, so that I can open up to experience the divine, and so that I can open myself for greater spiritual growth.

Renee: 10:25

And then so how would you define spirituality?

Jeannie: 10:31

Spirituality is that growth process. And unverified personal experiences that make you know that it's real.

Renee: 10:48

how active would you say you are in terms of your religious practice?

Jeannie: 10:55

Moderately active. I am involved with a community group that hosts open sabbats. I have my private practice and my private personal daily practices. I'm a member of the Topeka Interfaith, and to help be a spokesperson to present Paganism to the greater community, and to educate and to also help all faiths get along.

Renee: 11:38

How do you see your beliefs play out in your daily life?

Jeannie: 11:43

Okay, so as a Wiccan, there is something called the Wiccan Rede. Now, everybody's got their own little interpretation of it. But basically, rede means good advice. So when I look at the Rede, and some of the tenants of the Rede, basically, what it boils down to, is weigh your decisions and do what is best for everyone around you, yourself and others. So part of this, and part of the spiritual growth part is to try to do things that benefit the most people. To think before you speak, to think before you act, and just to be a better person. And some of the things that I do on a personal daily basis, is to help me take care of me. Because I think sometimes, especially as a mom, and a wife, Grandma, we forget to take care of ourselves. And that spiritual practice of taking those few minutes every day, and just holding space for yourself, I think is really important. It helps you become more self aware of who and what you are, and where you're at emotionally to help you deal with the things that happen in your life. So you respond and react in a manner that is beneficial to all.

Renee: 13:11

And are you a member of a coven?

Jeannie: 13:14

No. I have been, I'm currently not a member of a coven. I am affiliated loosely with a couple of groups that are are coven oriented. I am a Friend of Coven. But I find that I have not found people that share my exact pattern of worship. And so, I don't have that.... When you work with the coven it's a very small group of people. And if you're not all on the same wavelength and all kind of going with the same goal for ritual or for your spiritual development, it doesn't always mesh. And it's not because they're not awesome people and wonderful people. And sometimes working with people who are very different from you can help you to grow. But I do my own thing.

Renee: 14:21

Do you have any family that are also involved in Paganism?

Jeannie:

My children.

Renee: 14:29

Were you raised in a particular religious tradition?

Jeannie: 14:33

Not particularly. We spent a lot of time in the Methodist Church going to after school programs and Sunday school. My my earliest experience was with the local nondenominational congregation, Sunday school. And when I got into high school, the neighbors went to the Assembly of God. And we got... Mom and dad, we were farmers, we lived a mile from town and Mary Lou and Jim were kind enough to offer take us kids to church, you know, shove religion down our throats. And we went and it was fun. I got to hang out with other kids, you know. But I also got to see the other side of religion with the snip snap, the talk about everybody behind their back in the car on the way to and from, and that kind of didn't sit well with me. And that's not the way my parents were. My parents were not... I'd never seen that kind of behavior before. And it was really unsettling for me. But that's neither here nor there. But it's one of the things that kind of lay that groundwork for questioning.

Renee: 15:51

Growing up, how aware were you of other faith traditions and religions?

Jeannie: 15:56

There were Lutherans and Catholics. I grew up in central Minnesota and, you know, multi religions were Lutherans and Catholics, and Baptists and Methodists, and it wasn't until high school that I had my first experience with religion other than Christianity. And that was, when I was in for 4H, we had a public speaking contest that was sponsored by the Jewish Community Relations Council out of Minneapolis. I was one of the regional winners. I got to go to Minneapolis for a weekend, I got to stay with a Jewish family, and got to go to the synagogue, we got to go to an event at the community center that was targeted for us, you know, so that we got to do the traditional dances, we got to sit with a rabbi and ask all the silly, crazy questions, farm kids from Minnesota wanted to ask because we didn't know anything. And it was really cool. They were wonderful people. And they were so down to earth, and they were so family oriented. And what I got out of it was that, you know, their their whole goal was to be the best they could be, good people. And and I just felt really, it was awesome. But yeah, that was my first experience with any other faith.

Renee: 17:23

Today, how would you rate your knowledge of other religious traditions?

Jeannie: 17:27

I would say I'm above average. I had the benefit of having some exposure to multiple cultures. I've gotten old enough where I've seen a little bit and done a little bit. Way past that stage when I was a teenager and living on a farm in the middle of nowhere. I would say I'm above average.

Renee: 17:55

How long have you practiced Paganism?

Jeannie: 17:57

Oh, my gosh, 1993 or 94? How long ago was that? Awhile.

Renee: 18:06

How did you come to be involved in Paganism?

Jeannie: 18:11

I had a dear friend of mine, who started talking about Witchcraft. And she worried me terribly because she was going to go to hell and her soul was going to be damned forever, right. And so I decided that I better find out what in the world she's getting into, So I can save her. And she gave me a book to read and it kind of pissed me off because the book made more sense than anything else I'd read a long time. So she handed me another book. And then I start asking questions, and then it was just a downhill slide from there. But no, it made sense.

Renee: 18:50

Do you know, what the books were?

Jeannie: 18:51

Yes. The very first book that I ever had my hands on was *True Magic* by Amber K. And I rediscovered that book, a friend of mine had it, she was getting rid of a bunch of stuff. And I went "Ohhh the Amber K book. That was the one Maggie loaned me." So I now possess it. And then Scott Cunningham's *Wicca: guide for the solitary practitioner*. And of course, then I went through the *Living Wicca*, I went through the Buckland's big blue and I went through.... I read everything, I could get my hands on, Starhawk, Margot Adler and everything that was out at that time. There wasn't as many books then as there is now. And eventually, they, you know, if you read enough of these books, they all start sounding the same. And then you just, you go from there. But it was, it was a journey into myself. I can't say who influenced me the most. It was a little this a little of that and a lot of experimenting. Because I still don't know what I'm doing.

Renee: 19:54

Why do you think people are attracted to Paganism?

Jeannie: 19:59

I can't speak for other people really. I know that, for me, it was the being able to do something. You know, if you're.... One of the things that happened back when I got started with Paganism, I was in a place where I was trying to find my spiritual center. I had a lot of crap going on in my life, divorce, some other problems, all sorts of just lots of stuff. And I went to the church that I had gone to. And basically it was well read the Bible, you will get your answers. Read the Bible, you'll get your answers. And I wanted to do something, I wanted to do something to fill this void. And one of the things with Paganism is that it gives you things to do to become a better person. The rituals are great, and they help you tap in, but then you have to back it with work. And you have physical things you can touch and do that make it more real. And then the concept of you know, there's just morally its..How do I explain this? Some of the traditional faiths have extreme restrictions, and are really judgy judgy. And not all people are like that. I'm not, you know, saying everybody. We get some weird Pagans too. But I don't necessarily believe in, I never have believed in original sin. I thought that was a crock. I've always had a problem with the lack of the female in religion. Where Paganism gives us that, that goddess, that female figure, that inspiration. Where, you know, the Catholics have Mother Mary, which is phenomenal, it's wonderful. But so many of the other faiths have no divine feminine, there's no place for women. Women have always felt like they've been subjugated, they've been pushed down and oppressed. And in Paganism, women especially are able to become empowered. And I think that's a huge thing. And you'll see a lot of the female aspect and women in leadership roles in Paganism. And yes, there's males and in Paganism, but you'll find Wicca tends to... Most of the practitioners I know are women. There's more and more men coming in, it's becoming more balanced, which is phenomenal. It's wonderful, it's awesome. The women have a place though, where they don't always have a place in other religions. And then there's also the, you know, nudity and sexuality and the whole different concept of how Paganism treats that, it's not a sin. Nudity is natural, sex is natural. There's responsibility with both, with everything. And in finding that balance that's right for you. But there's far less rules.

Renee: 23:43

And so you are involved with Pagans in the Park and the interfaith work. Can you tell me a bit more about those organizations, their history and membership?

Jeannie: 23:57

Okay, well, let's start with... Let's go to the easy one, Interfaith, Google it. Interfaith has been around in Topeka for quite some time. It's a group of local religious organizations that have decided to come together to promote religious understanding. And it's the coolest. I've been able to get invited to go to the Jewish temple to have a Muslim Sufi do meditation, it was awesome. So it gives us a way to show that different religions can work together, and we can make an impact and make change. One of the big things that they do is a community Thanksgiving service, that's multi faith. And it has everyone there, it has the Jewish community, the Muslims, the Pagans. I'm a recent addition to the board. They've had Pagan representation for many years, which is, like I said, awesome. As far as it's, I don't know, there's not much else to say about that.

Jeannie:

Pagans in the Park is...Oh boy, how do you go back to history on this one? I've been involved with community event organizing for many years. It's something that I really, truly enjoy. And in the different communities that I've been in, whether it's been up in Minnesota, or when I was in western Kansas, this is something that makes, it's very important to me. Because as Pagans, even when we're praying, especially when we're practicing as a solitary Pagan, it's so important for us to be able to network and learn from others. We don't have to necessarily have the same faith. We don't necessarily have to have the same beliefs per se. But the exposure and the camaraderie and the fellowship is important. Pagans in the Park well, basically, what happened is that there is nothing in our community. And we wanted something in our community. So Milton, one of the other people that are involved with it, decided to rent a shelter at Gage Park, and see who comes.

Jeannie: 26:24

And people came. And so we decided to do that again, four times a year for the cross quarter, or for excuse me, for the for the quarters. Not the quarters, the solstices and the equinoxes. The four lesser Sabbats. And we've rented the shelter, and people came. And that's pretty much you know... I mean, we want it to become owned by the community. And that's what the goal is there. It's really, it's amazing. We've had different people take up, volunteer to stand up and lead ritual, people who have never done it before. So there's great learning opportunities there. We like our food. And of course, the potluck it's been totally successful each time. And it gives the community a chance to... It gives people that may not have been able to connect with other Pagans a chance to find out that they're not alone. So that's really what it's about. I mean, there's there's all sorts of stuff going on in the community in this area. We've got a metaphysical store here in Topeka. Lawrence, I think they still have one in Lawrence, The Village Witch. And then there's a you know, Kansas City's got Aquarius, just 45 minutes north. East of Topeka i McLouth, home to one of the largest Pagan festivals and longest running Pagan festivals, in the United States. So there's a lot out there, but there's still people who are afraid. Because Pagans have gotten a bad rap, and you can lose your job, you can lose, you know...Bigotry and hatred is rampant in the world right now. And some people are just afraid. I've been lucky. I have not had any repercussions.

Renee: 28:30

Have you ever felt the need to hide your religion?

Jeannie: 28:34

Yes. Yes. I don't necessarily go...I have used euphemisms many times, let's just put it that way. If somebody comes out and asked me, I'm going to be very honest with them. But there are times and places where using a, like I said, euphemism to downplay my religious beliefs, so that it didn't cause problems, has definitely been a tactic that I've used. Because there are certain work environments and times when it would not be appropriate to go "Yeah, I'm a Witch." So I have a funny story. I am, I don't know why I did this, but I went and got a personalized plate. And it says Witch. And it's, it's WY TCH. I've had people take pictures of it. There's somebody

on the road behind me, and you can see them back there trying to get a picture of my license plate. It's hilarious. The best one though was someone who looked at it, looked at it again. And went "Did you go to Wyoming Tech?" And I'm just going "No, I didn't,." So I really haven't had a lot of negative things. I did have my co workers have a small tizzy fit when they found out I went to a large Pagan festival. They were trying to figure out where I went, and I figured it out. Oh my goodness gracious, I heard about when I got back that there was quite a tizzy in the office, but oh, well. They just couldn't believe it. Whatever. Yeah. Next.

Renee: 30:52

How do you advertise for Pagans in the Park?

Jeannie: 30:55

Facebook. There's a... we need to get on Witchvox. That hasn't been used as much anymore. There's so many things, the internet is phenomenal. Word of mouth, Facebook, Facebook invites. We make sure that there's a couple of groups that are Pagan oriented in the area that are on Facebook, and we make sure that we post on there. We do some flyers, put them in the metaphysical shops, post them around the little here and there where we think people might see them. But most of its most of its word of mouth in and social media.

Renee: 31:41

There's a Facebook group Capital City Pagans. Is that the same as Pagans in the Park?

Jeannie:

No. I'm involved with Capital City Pagans. It was, there's a lovely lady named M, who started that. And she had been very active in the Manhattan community and had started Flint Hills, Pagans, this is lyst This goes way back into history here. And when she moved to Topeka, she started Capital City Pagans. And when she she's, again, she's moved out of the area. And I all of a sudden end up as administrator on this stupid thing, but hey, whatever. But Cap City Pagans is just a social group. There's not really anything that happens on it except publicizing events, and having people get a chance to be able to, you know, have a place where they can go, "Hey, I'm pagan, how are you?" There's Kansas Pagans, there's Topeka Pagan Gatherings, which is designed to be again, an information sharing website. Pagans in the Park does have a page now. And I guess one of the things is that everybody who goes to Pagans in the Park probably is to some extent, a member or involved in some way, shape, or form with all of those because it becomes like this incestuous family type thing. Everybody who's Pagan, who's open, pretty much knows everybody else who's Pagan who's open. And everybody's part of these groups. And even the one group that I'm not an admin on, I know, the admin. We're both admins for Pagans in the Park.

Renee: 33:32

How large Would you say the Topeka Pagan community is?

Jeannie: 33:44

There's so many of them that I don't know. That's what makes it tough. I'm always finding people who have been out in the community who do their own thing. I know that there's active covens in town who don't participate in Pagans in the Park, who do their own thing. We've got Pagans who...I'd say there's several hundred, couple hundred, 200- 300 people that are Pagan. Now, you know, do they all come to events, no. But that's, that's neither here nor there. That's just you know, they have their own thing. They're happy with what they're doing.

Renee: 34:24

How often are their Pagan social gatherings other than for rituals?

Jeannie 34:32

In Topeka?

Renee:

Yeah.

Jeannie:

There's not a whole lot. There's the coffee nights, and Topeka Pagan Gatherings. One of those other groups, they host a coffee night at one of the local coffee shops. Probably, I think they're doing it once a month or once every other month right now. Again, it gives an opportunity for people come out and find out that they're not alone.

Renee: 35:07

What are the rituals like that you do for Pagans in the Park?

Jeannie: 35:13

Well we're relatively new. So we've only really had just a handful of them. They've been Wiccan in nature. We celebrated Yule, We did the celebration of the Holly King and Oak King, which is kind of a traditional Yule theme. We did Ostara, and we did some spring planting magic seeds and very traditional. We did summer solstice, which was done as a meditation and again, a different type of practice, different participants, different High Priestess. I know that we're expecting Mabon, the fall Equinox, to be a little bit more elaborate. We have a more experienced practitioner that's that's going to be leading rituals. So she's already warned us it's going to be a bit theatrical, which is awesome. This is awesome. Are Yule ritual got a little sidelined, we had somebody develop a very serious illness and medical emergency, and it kind of tanked everything we were doing for Yule. For our first gathering at Mabon we did not do ritual, because it was just is anybody even going to show up? And it became a community. The feedback we had was they wanted community ritual. So yes, it's a community group.

Renee:

That's what they want.

Jeannie:

Yeah, yeah.

Renee: 36:54

How many people generally show up for Pagans in the Park?

Jeannie: 36:58

We've had I think around somewhere anywhere between 20 and 30 showing up, which is an adequate nice sized crowd. You know, there's a lot of other things happening that draws them away. Usually there's other conflicts because it's a sabbat, a holiday. Camp Gaea has a big ritual every sabbat, again, some people go out there. There's another coven that does their rituals pretty much at the same time, and there's some speak people to go to that. The druids are usually doing something. There's just a lot, there's a lot more going on than just Pagans in the Park. So the fact that we do get 25 to 30 people to show up is awesome. It makes it worthwhile for us>

Renee: 37:56

Is it usually the same core group of people?

Jeannie: 37:59

Yes. And then we will have this, there's always a few new faces, though, every single time. So that's really fun.

Renee: 38:10

How much planning goes into each ritual?

Jeannie: 38:13

Depends on who's doing it, you know? That's a really a good question. Because it depends on who's doing it and how elaborate the ritual is. I have thrown together a group ritual in, you know, on the fly. I haven't had to do that for Pagans in the Park. But I've also been involved with rituals where there were weeks of careful planning because of the structure and gathering the supplies. And you know, if there's other people that are being that are in it, that you're coordinating with, it can become very time intensive, especially if you're if you're teaching other people chants. Most of the time though, I'd say that the one person puts together the ritual probably spends five to six hours researching and putting it together, and then giving a very short description to anybody who's assisting that's clearly cut. "Here read this." I would have to say that's usually about five to six hours probably in putting it together.

Renee: 39:43

Has your membership and participation in these groups affected your life outside of the group?

Jeannie: 39:48

Oh my gosh, yeah. You know, I've been doing this for a long time. And we have developed some the best friends have ever had with some of my participation in groups. St. Cloud

Minnesota, I we still have dear friends that we go back and they fight to help, you know, whose house we're going to stay at? It's amazing. They're like family. My best friend in the whole world is someone that I circled with when I was in western Kansas. And time and distance have made it very difficult now because we're, she's now in a different state. She moved to Wisconsin, but she is my best friend. And and I cherish her. We have a group of ladies called the Yayas. And they are again my soul sisters. They are all crazy Wiccans like I am. And we, again, we have core roots. And we're kind of spread out a little bit. The one who moved to Wisconsin used to be in Salina, that she moved to Hayes, now she's in Wisconsin. What can you do? I have another dear friend of mine in Hanover, had one that was in Wichita, and she's now in Hanover. And then we have a couple ladies that we bonded with when we go to the the women's retreat at Gaea. And they are in Kansas City. We get together twice a year. Once is at the ladies, the Gaia Goddess Gathering at Camp Gaia. And the other we get together at Imbolc in February. And we do a Yaya weekend. And we've gone to a hotel and did the hotel thing. Always have to go out for a steak dinner. And the rest of the time is spent cackling and giggling and being really stupid. Really stupid. One time we we found out that the liquor store had shopping carts. So there's six crazy women putting their favorite liquors in it. Did you know we never drank any of it. We all bought wine, and I don't even know what. We're not drinkers. So you know, we're just... Arbor Mist for God's sake. There's Kahlua, and Bailey's, and Tequila Rose. My friend and I, the best friend from Wisconsin, she and I, "Oh, they have the tequila Rose with the shot glasses" we had to buy it." It took me four years to drink that thing.

Jeannie: 42:20

We kept bring it out. It was the never ending bottle of Tequila Rose. So we're just... It's a female bonding fun, silly, girl time, you know. Bunch of old ladies with gray hair acting totally ridiculous. And they're my soul sisters, and that's part of what this is. You develop these bonds because you start weaving these threads. And, especially when you're circling together, and sometimes circles are, especially small circles, you start talking about and healing inner things. And they start coming out, and all of a sudden you're, you know, you devise something and you go, "I've got to deal with this." You know, everything from you know, weight, the weights that you carry with you from divorce, broken relationships, family, deep seated family tragedies and trauma, sexual abuse, all of these things start to come up as you start to heal. And being in circle with people that you trust, you can let these things out. You develop...It's like leaving a web. You develop these strong connections with these people. And they help you heal, you help each other heal. And there's many tears that have been shed, inside of a circle with the candles glowing as you bear your soul. And the hugs, and the touches, and the holding your hand as you cry and you let go of all that. All of that. And being able to you know, you burn the letter. One time we were we were all dealing with crap. And we made paper chains. You know, like little kids do, wrote all of this stuff. And came into circle wound up in these paper chains. And we broke them and we burned them. And because we all had talked, we let go of that stuff. And there's something that, again, there's something freeing. empowering, and healing about this. And that's really where the magic is. So yes, has it changed my life outside of the groups? My God, yes. I wouldn't change it for anything in the world.

Renee: 45:08

Are there important visual symbols and music that is involved in your ritual practice?

Jeannie: 45:15

Oh yes. Symbols are huge. Okay, so you come into the circle, and it sounds really silly. Okay, little tools, and you've got candles, and you got a little dish of water. And to somebody on the outside, you know. What it is is your your mind, you're letting your mind go deeper. You're letting the inner child out, you're playing. And by doing this, it breaks down the barriers. So these symbols not only put your head into a ritual space, they let you let go of the mundane. And the symbols help trigger you to go to that spot that centers you, calms you, relaxes you, and lets you open up to the light of the Divine so to speak, lets you become vulnerable.

Renee: 46:21

Do you have spells and rituals you traditionally use? Or are you creating new ones?

Jeannie: 46:27

I create most of them new. Well, I have a Book of Shadows and I will recycle. But I have written most of my own. But if I find something really awesome, I'll borrow it, you better believe it. Pagans are really good about borrowing from each other. And back to music. Music is huge, chanting and singing and dancing and drumming. Because of the energy is... And we're not the only religion who does that. You know, you look at the gospel choirs. Oh, they've got energy. We do the same thing.

Renee: 47:09

Do you have a favorite ritual or sabbat?

Jeannie: 47:19

I wouldn't say I have a favorite. I love each of them for their own unique aspect. They all have something so special. It's it's kind of like, you know, it's not like you get to say, "do you like Christmas or Easter better?" Everybody knows wins there. But you know, I think Samhain is amazing. except it's been so commercialized. Yule is so busy, because everybody is scattered around, because Christmas has really become a cultural holiday, and has overtaken anything. And it's Yeah... I love Imbolc because I get my Yayas. Ostara, I mean, eggs and bunnies, you know, I mean, it's awesome. Beltane, well Beltane has just a little bit of romantic and sexual energy to it that makes it really fun. And of course, Litha the summer solstice, I mean, that's hot and miserable probably. And Lammas the feast of bread. Finding that first harvest, getting those first vegetables in oh, yum, yum, yum, yum, yum. And Mabon, I really kind of like Mabon It's fun because of the time of year, it's cool. And it's almost like the Pagan Thanksgiving. So but I couldn't name one that I like, the most. I like them all. I'm just a greedy little Witch.

Renee: 49:04

How do members of the various Pagan groups interact with members of the general public?

Jeannie: 49:14

I'm not sure I know what you mean.

Renee:

Like, is there tension between people who identify as being Pagan and want to participate in public groups, and the larger community?

Jeannie: 49:28

Oh, you mean, you know, the Pagans and the others?

Renee:

Yes.

Jeannie:

Depends. I think that there's...It just depends. I think Pagans are a little afraid sometimes because of some of the stereotypes. I've seen some very rude, caustic, nasty people who, on both sides of it. I might, okay. When my husband and I got married, we came from.... Got married later in life. And we weren't really quite sure what to do. Because I wanted a Wiccan wedding. I wanted the full blown, full sabbat. Everything from a Wiccan wedding, as we call it. His family is from Texas..

[Interrupted by someone else who asked if we were hearing chattering.]

Jeannie: 51:18

So, back to the wedding. So we have the... Sorry about that interruption. So we decided that we better break the news to our family before they start traveling. His family's from Texas. His 87 year old mother is going to be driving up all the way from Texas to go to this wedding. And, and as a good Southern Baptist lady, she might not quite know what to do with us. My Catholic, Lutheran and other Protestant faiths from Minnesota probably not gonna know what to do with us either. So we decided to just tell everybody. "By the way, don't be surprised if this is going to offend you. We just want to be straight up here okay. We really want everyone to come. But we don't want anybody uncomfortable." And we laid it out. We had a two page description of what we believe, a brief synopsis of what to expect in the ritual, and why we did it, you know laid it out, you're going to see this. And, you know, they all came. They all came. And it was so awesome. Because no one was offended. No one was... It was great. And I was kind of surprised at how wonderfully accepting our families were. And even the 80 year old grandmother from.... Now her husband wouldn't come, he stayed in the hotel room. But that's probably just as well.

Renee:

Is your husband pagan as well?

Jeannie:

Yes. Yes. His his Pagan streak is different than mine. He is not a Wiccan, he practices more of a pantheistic type faith where he just believes that God is nature and nature is God. Probably more similar to Native American beliefs than as far as the the energies of the earth. Yeah, so. But yes, he's Pagan. We met at a Pagan festival, we met at Gaea.

Renee: 54:17

Does the group have any of their own behavior codes or prohibitions?

Jeannie: 54:23

We don't, other than no bullying. No, you know, the only thing that we've really addressed, formally is straight up, everybody has to treat everyone with respect, and there is to be no bashing of religions, or other faiths, or ethnicities or sexual orientations, etc. Play nice. You know, I mean it. And that's really where we've kept it. We figured that if we have a need to address something, we will address it. But we're not going to sit and make a whole bunch of rules arbitrarily just because we can make them. That's sort of anti Pagan.

Renee: 55:20

Are there like, dress codes or ideas about how people should present themselves for rituals?

Jeannie: 55:30

No, no, we're not a formal group. We don't have a book of laws. We don't have formal ritual etiquette. Pretty much play nice. But you know, anything... we've had people in full garb, and we've had people in street clothes, we do ask you to wear clothes, Skyclad is not allowed in Gage Park. You know, other than keep your clothes on, we don't feel it's in our best interest to put those kinds of rules and regulations in place. Just because if you're going to have that, you have to have a group that all agrees to it. And it's just not the nature of... It's come as you are. We just want you there.

Renee: 56:32

And have you ever thought about leaving some of the groups that you're involved in?

Jeannie: 56:40

They don't let me. I'm still involved... I will back away sometimes just for time, I just got sometimes there's too much on my plate. And I've never, I don't think I've ever walked away from a group, per se. I've maybe not attended as frequently. Just it's more of a time and energy and only so many hours in the day, and I've got to earn a living and yeah.

Renee: 57:21

What have been the best and worst things about being involved with the local Pagan community?

Jeannie: 57:27

Well, here, I haven't had any worst. Other places, again, long history. There can be very strong egos, and head butting in a Pagan community. And Pagan leadership tends to sometimes be hard headed. I'm guilty as anybody else there. And trying to organize Pagans sometimes is like herding cats. We as a group of people tend to be very independent. We tend to be opinionated, bullheaded, stubborn. And, yeah, so I've seen some, I think some of the things that happens is the it's... I'm not talking about Topeka here, I'm talking about outside Pagan areas. And although it's not that it hasn't ever hit this community. It just hasn't hit here in a long, long time. There seems to be a competition when it comes to who's the leader. And it gets to the ego thing. Like I said, we're all guilty of it, good God, you know, we're humans, and we're far from perfect. And I think that, as far as a negative aspect of the community, because there's no formal leadership, you sometimes get factions that compete, they become competitive, and that causes discord. And you'll get personalities who just don't mesh, and it can cause discord. And in there, because there isn't a structure in place for arbitration or resolution or mediation, these can fester and not work themselves out well, and can cause rifts in the community. And I think that in the past, the Topeka Pagan community has had that.

Jeannie: 1:00:07

Now, that's one of the reasons why Pagans in the Park is so important to many of us, it's a chance for healing and growth and, and the renewal of the community. I am not, I was not in Topeka when some of these other issues came about and I'm not privy to the details. I just know that, Manhattan has had some issues. Get into the Lawrence area, and there's other things happening there. And it's just we're people, and very strong, opinionated people. And and that can cause some issues, hard feelings, uglies.

Renee: 1:00:55

What about the best thing about being involved?

Jeannie: 1:00:58

Oh, the best thing is the friendships. Oh, my gosh, it's... You said I can talk about my Yayas. If it wasn't for some of the community events that I've attended, I would not have my Yayas.

Renee: 1:01:12

And final question, what do you wish more people understood about Paganism?

Jeannie: 1:01:22

Other than the obvious that we don't worship Satan and sacrifice small animals and children, let's see. You know, that we're normal people. The majority of the Pagans that I know, are average everyday people. They're not in... You know, before the interview we were joking around, and I had said that we have cereal Pagans, the fruits, nuts and flakes. And every religion has that. But I think those are the ones that people see. Those are the ones that are up front and center. And, you know, and the rest of us cringe because it's all... My god, we don't walk around wearing, you know, wizard garb. I mean, we're mothers, fathers, sisters. We work.

You know, a lot of the Pagans I know are very professional. We have jobs that are, we're well educated for the most part, we have real jobs. You know, raise our children, raise our grandchildren, or play with our grandchildren and send them home. Yeah, I mean, we're not weird. We're very normal. I mean, no weirder than anybody else. We're fun weird maybe if you want to say we're weird. But we're just like everyone else is. Just that we have a little different belief in how that universal deity is viewed. We're just like everybody else.

Jeannie: 1:03:26

And I think that's the thing that if I was to, you know... Somebody once I was talking and they got on the subject and I went, "but I'm not a Christian." "How can you not be a Christian, you're a good person?" And that's the thing, that just because I'm not a Christian doesn't mean that I don't support a lot of the same things. There's more commonalities between our faiths than there are differences as far as how we want to act as people, how we want to be as people, how we expect to be treated people. That's, I think maybe the, we have more in common than we have in differences for the most part.

Renee: 1:04:13

Anything else you want to share?

UJeannie: 1:04:16

Oh, I gotta share my Yule story.

Renee:

Awesome.

Jeannie:

Yeah. Okay, this was way back in the early, late mid mid 90s. And my friend Maggie, the one that I was gonna save from herself, and I decided to have our first real ritual. Oh, and it was Yule. And we have little kids at time, yea high three foot tall ones, you know. And so we make cookies. And we have them shaped like pentacles and all sorts of cool things. And, and, you know, the kids decorate and oh the kids had a blast with this. So and this is in Minnesota, and this is Yule, this is December in Minnesota. And we decided that we had to have an outdoor ritual. We're not real bright. So we had straw bales in a big circle. And all the kids are out there with their hot chocolate and everything. And we had a fire and, and sleeping bags, and mittens and all that good stuff. And so we're going to try to do ritual. And Maggs and I are both nervous, because we are both looking at each other going, am I doing it wrong? And you know, we're not saying this. We're like, oh my god, you know, we've never done this. Is she judging me? So, well, we started off by not figuring out we lost the chalice in the hay bales, ended up using an insulated mug. I don't know what happened to the salt that, yeah, we were a little discombobulated. And it was dark. So it was dark. So we said, well, I have this beautiful story to read for the kids. So I'm trying to read the story and I can't see it. So somebody in their genius decides that there's candles, so let's use the candles. The problem is the children holding candles, tilted upside down, are going to drip all over you. You know, I never did get the wax out

of those jeans, ever. But it was fun. And we had a good time. It was Yeah.

Jeannie:

Oh, and then there was the time we accidentally had somebody's hair get caught on fire in circle. And it was the gentleman I was dating at the time, and he had a long beautiful hair and he was very very vain. And so it was kind of funny. Don't get so close to the candles with the long hair. I have not caught myself on fire, although everybody thinks that I should have the way as clumsy as I am. Circles are a great time to have a good time. They can be very serious, but they can be really funny too.

Renee: 1:07:04

All right. anything else?

Jeannie: 1:07:11

Yeah, I don't know. I guess that's it.

Renee:

All right.